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DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

C O P Y

25 November 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AFFAIRS) ATTENTION: MR. HAMBLEY

SUBJECT: Enemy Strengths in SVN (U)

1. (S/NFD) The following is in reply to questions received by phone 23 November from Mr. Hambley, ISA in regard to a DIA Memo to ISA dated 17 November 1966.

2. (S/NFD) Q. How many Viet Minh in SVN in 1954 remained in SVN instead of returning north? Of this number how many still remain in the enemy forces?

A. DRV reports to the French indicated that about 87,000 troops were withdrawn, while non-Communist estimates placed the total number of Communist military forces south of the 17th parallel at the time of the armistice at more than 100,000. Thus, approximately 13,000 Viet Minh troops probably remained in SVN in 1954 contrary to the provisions of the Geneva settlement.

There is no way of estimating, with any degree of reliability, how many of the Viet Minh troops that remained in SVN are still in the VC or NVA forces. Losses have taken place due to a variety of reasons not necessarily resulting from the fighting. These losses as well as combat losses cannot be established with any degree of confidence.

3. (S/NFD) Q. Of the regroupees* that came back to SVN, how many are still in country?

A. On the basis of infiltration statistics, it is estimated that from 1954 thru mid-1964, approximately 35,000 - 38,000 regroupees returned to South Vietnam. How many of these regroupees remain in SVN is not known. Losses have undoubtedly been sustained thru combat, defection, desertion, and sickness. Figures are not available to establish the extent of these losses and there is no reliable basis for estimating the losses.

* Regroupees - ethnic Southerners drawn from the Viet Minh troops and supporters regrouped to the North in 1954.

DIA review(s) completed.

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4. (S/NFD) Q. How many Northerners are in SVN at present?

A. The Northerners introduced into SVN fall into the following categories:

a. Viet Minh who remained in SVN in 1954,	13,000
b. Regroupees (ethnic Southerners who went north and have returned since 1954),	35,000 - 38,000
c. NVN personnel (ethnic Northerners),	<u>83,000 - 105,000</u>
Total:	131,000 - 156,000

The estimated number in each category is at best tenuous. The figures for categories b and c are based on infiltration statistics which are currently accepted but considered conservative. This area is under study and may result in a significant increase in the accepted number of infiltrators.

To proceed from the number of Northerners introduced into SVN to those presently remaining requires an estimate of the losses incurred. The number of battlefield casualties is both the most important and least reliable statistic required to estimate Communist losses. The figure is subject to error because of inaccurate or inflated body counts, inclusion of non-military casualties, and the Communist practice of removing their dead and wounded. An even more difficult problem is that of attempting to allocate casualties between the VC, NVA, and other categories. The characteristics of guerrilla warfare makes it impossible to distinguish between civilians, irregulars, VC main force, and NVA troops killed in action. Similar ethnic characteristics, lack of uniforms and unit insignia are some of the basic problems encountered. The wide range of errors and shortcomings in the infiltration and casualty statistics precludes a reliable estimate of the number of Northerners remaining in SVN. Because of these shortcomings it was necessary to base an estimate of the Northerners in SVN on analytical judgments as outlined in the Memo for ISA dated 17 November 1966. The figures presented in paragraph 7 of the 17 November DIA Memo reflect casualties to the extent that the personnel are assumed to be assigned to key positions that would continue to be filled regardless of casualties.

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